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Our new governor's mixed messages

What did Kate Brown mean and when did she mean it?

This may be the shortest honeymoon on record. One week after her inauguration, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is fouling her own nest.

Or she's letting others foul it for her. And if you are the state's chief executive, subordinates should not be doing things you say you do not want done.

In her inaugural address last week, Gov. Brown said, "... Throughout my 24 years in public service, I have also sought to promote transparency and trust in government." And she said, "We also must strengthen laws to ensure timely release of public documents."

Nick Budnick of The Oregonian reported on Monday that Brown's lieutenant, Michael Jordan, has asked Oregon State Police to conduct a criminal investigation into the person who leaked Gov. John Kitzhaber's emails. Separately, he has put key officials of the Department of Administrative Services on administrative leave. They were the people who refused to destroy Gov. John Kitzhaber's emails.

The Kitzhaber team, and perhaps now the Brown team, argued that Kitzhaber's personal emails were different than his official emails. But Nigel Jaquiss of Willamette Week recently noted that when emails are sent on government computers, they are public business and subject

to public inspection.

James Moore, a politics professor at Pacific University, told Budnick that a criminal investigation is "overkill" and said "it conflicted with Brown's public statements embracing transparency."

Was Gov. Brown's inaugural statement written in invisible ink — designed to disappear within a week?

In terms of the state's business, Kitzhaber's personal and public emails are intertwined. The window those emails have opened into the Kitzhaber administration tell us just how the state's business was being done. On Wednesday, WW reported that emails show that Kitzhaber handed over operational control of Cover Oregon to his re-election campaign manager, Patricia McCaig. That is a breathtaking revelation of Kitzhaber admitting his own incompetence to run the state.

By allowing Jordan to conduct this witch hunt, Gov. Brown appears to be participating — wittingly or unwittingly — in the attempt to cleanse her predecessor's record.

If she meant what she said at her inauguration, Gov. Brown should tell Michael Jordan to knock it off.

Retaliation against federal whistleblowers must end

The Obama bureaucracy continues to sound a peculiarly sour note when it comes to handling whistleblowing and other forms of dissent within the ranks of federal employees. Although claims by the president's harshest detractors that he is a tyrant are clearly absurd, some behavior by political appointees certainly contradicts the administration's public-relations persona as a prime defender of democracy.

Much attention already has been devoted to actions by high-ranking appointees designed to silence workers who provide reporters with information that is "off message" or not in keeping with the administration's preset talking points. But a new report from Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) focuses on a different variety of suppression: Punishing government scientists and managers who don't toe the line with regard to agency decisions.

Current allegations surround actions within upper echelons of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, especially concerning endangered species decisions in Texas. Actions against a 28-year veteran employee of the USFWS make a mockery of the agency's Scientific Integrity Policy, which is supposed to protect researchers and their findings from the heavy-handed interference that corrupted federal decisions during the Bush/Reagan years.

The Texas-based USFWS manager was placed "on an

open-ended 'detail' causing him to leave Austin for Albuquerque for a position with no apparent duties," according to PEER, an independent organization that provides outside oversight federal environmental agencies. "The reassignment followed his reporting a number of scientific integrity concerns, including what he termed a blatantly political decision by the FWS hierarchy to reverse the staff recommendation that the dune sagebrush lizard, with habitat in the heart of Texas oil country, be listed under the Endangered Species Act."

USFWS national Director Dan Ashe personally intervened to keep the manager in exile in New Mexico, even after the Whistleblower Ombudsman for Interior's Office of Inspector General found a pattern of retaliation against the employee. An administrative judge ruled that "whistleblowing retaliation is tolerated or even condoned" in the USFWS.

Whatever the underlying policy disputes may be, it's ridiculous and unacceptable to punish whistleblowers and suppress scientific findings.

"It is hard to dispute that emerging safeguards against politicized science are stillborn," Peer's executive director said. "Until these agencies admit the problem exists, there will be no progress. The first meaningful step toward reform would be removing Dan Ashe as director." This recommendation appears appropriate.



EO Media Group File
 Cannon Beach Public Works employees Kirk Anderson, left, and Paul Phillips, right foreground, place the NeCus' Park sign atop its base near Fir Street in January.

Listening — really listening — is the only way to learn the message

IMPRESSIONS

BY
 NANCY
 MCCARTHY



We are the land. The stories of our people — we're all about the land.'

And so, the tale of the Native Americans who lived on the North Coast hundreds — thousands — of years before pioneer settlers ever approached began.

It was a standing-room-only crowd in the Seaside Public Library community room during the "Listening to the Land" lecture sponsored by the North Coast Land Conservancy.

For two hours we listened to Dick Basch, the vice chairman of the Clatsop-Nehalem tribes, and his wife, Roberta, who calls herself a "Heinz 57" of tribal affiliations. Through slides showing old photographs, Dick introduced us to his great-grandfather, Joe Duncan, "who lived when the land was gone" and took up logging to "keep the family alive."

There were other slides, of another tribal member, Simon, first as a young boy in the 1800s, then as a young man, who left the North Coast for 10 years to attend school. As a young lawyer, Simon returned home and saw how the settlers had occupied the land of his ancestors.

The settlers, Dick said, saw that the land "provided everything people needed."

"Simon was the first to file lawsuits against the federal government for return of the land," Dick said, raising his chin and smiling ever so slightly.

The slides showed his grandfather clam digging and, later, with family at Indian Beach.

For many, many years Indian children were raised on the beach, at Arch Cape or Hug Point, Dick said.

"Indian Beach was one of the last holdouts," he said of the area now part of Ecola State Park. "It was one of the last places we had people living in a village."

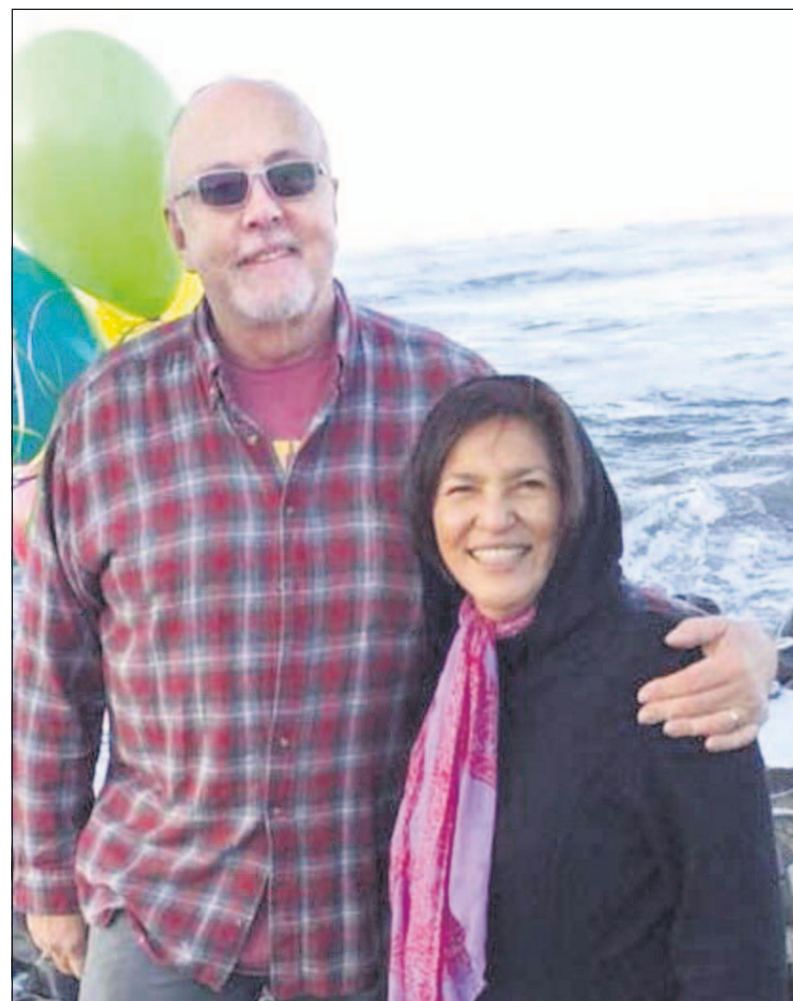
Another slide showed Dick as a child, at what is now called NeCus' Park, which once was the former playground of Cannon Beach Elementary School. The photo was taken in 1955, the sesquicentennial celebration of Lewis and Clark's arrival on this land.

Even as he described the slide and how he had come dressed for his Indian role, Dick couldn't mask the excitement he still felt about that day 60 years ago when he gathered with family and friends on land where a

'There's a dance of energy and color in every single plant.'

— Roberta Basch

Native American on how they relate to the land



Courtesy of the Basch family

Richard and Roberta Basch of the Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes spoke at the Listening to the Land talk recently in Seaside.

Clatsop village once stood.

"We lost a lot of our culture," he said. "We sort of pushed it down because it wasn't accepted."

The loss of culture may have started as long ago as 1851, when Clatsop Chief Tostow signed a treaty with the federal government; he was clearly not happy about it.

When asked why he was days late arriving to sign the document, Tostow told the government officials, "We were not so very anxious to sell our homes and be driven away like so many birds as we have heard was to be done as soon as we sold our lands."

Although the treaty reassured the Clatsops that their fishing rights would be protected on Neacoxie Creek and that they would be free to walk along the beach, later they found that newly constructed fences barred them from the land they had once occupied and had fed them.

"It's hard to understand how it really happened," Dick told us. "How it happened here."

But with the Clatsop-Nehalem tribe's recent participation in the Canoe Project, the tribe's smoldering spirit caught fire. The Canoe Project, which required the tribe first to find a cedar log large enough to build a 36-foot-long canoe, then to carve it, brought the Northwest tribes together as they embarked on canoe trips along the Pacific Coast to visit each other and attend celebrations.

From those ongoing explorations, Roberta Basch said, the tribes are

learning their songs and sharing stories. They trade information about wild herbs and flowers that can be applied as medicine or eaten for nourishment.

And, they continue to listen to the land.

Neahkahnie Mountain, Roberta said, is "one of the most powerful places on Earth" and remains a sacred place. Saddle Mountain also is revered by the Clatsops.

"People don't understand what makes us different, why we are connected to the earth," Roberta said.

"We're sent out to listen," she added. "When we're listening to the land, we're forming a relationship with the land. ... There's a dance of energy and color in every single plant."

This relationship — a way of "connecting with your soul" — she calls "Indian science." It's what "European science," which involves experimentation, measurement, hypotheses and proofs, is missing.

"Imagine how powerful it would be if they were matched together," Roberta Basch said.

As I left the lecture, I wondered why so many people had turned out on a Wednesday night to listen to Dick and Roberta, who are already well known on the North Coast. Perhaps it was curiosity. Maybe it was a genuine desire to learn more about the Indians' history about the land we all share.

But I hope, in any case, we all listened closely. And we keep listening.

That's the only way healing will begin.

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